

BOOK REVIEW

Joint Forest Management in India: Spread, Performance and Impact, by N.H. Ravindranath and P. Sudha, eds, (2004), Universities Press, Hyderabad, India, 340 pp., ISBN 81 7371 486 X.

The title of this book will never be misleading. Indeed, the book assesses the performance, monitors the spread and depicts the ecological and socio-economic impacts of the joint forest management (JFM) program implemented during the last decade in India, with a wealth of up-to-date survey data.

The book reminds the audience that the concept of joint management of forests between the state and forest communities in India originated from a Divisional Forest Officer at Arabari, Midnapore district, West Bengal in 1972. Faced with the problem of an area of new plantation being repeatedly damaged by cattle grazing, he came up with an innovative idea: In exchange for a share of the final timber harvest, the locals would refrain from grazing the cattle in the plantation area. The strategy was found to work, but could not rapidly spread from one community to another in the 1970s and 1980s. Social forestry was the dominant forestry management scheme in India in this period. In social forestry, communities were the passive receptors of a scheme, being viewed as the cause of forest degradation, rather than actors to solve the problem. A paradigm shift at the national forestry policy level had not occurred until the Forest Policy of 1988 set the stage for participatory forest management in India and subsequently the Government of India JFM order of 1990 legitimised rural communities' claims to forests and formalised the JFM system.

The JFM program has been seen successful, although the momentum of JFM implementation in India varies in different states. According to the editors of the book, the JFM forests extended over 17 M ha spread through 27 states, being managed through more than 84,000 JFM committees, as of September 2003. The authors point out that the scale and likely impact of JFM is enormous, and approaching those of social forestry. India's forest covers an area of approximately 64 M ha, 19.5% of the total geographic area.

As the Indian form of community forestry, JFM has received considerable attention in recent years from other parts of the world. In this sense, the arrival of the book is timely. This book provides insights into the evolution of the national forest policies in India and discusses the present status and future of the JFM program in six states, based on field studies conducted by the Ecological and Economics Research Network (EERN). In addition, the book suggests a strategy for monitoring and evaluating JFM, and institutional and silvicultural options to sustain JFM.

The book contains 14 chapters, each of which was prepared by separate authors, who are all from research institutes and universities in India. The book is more than just a collection of monographs which may more or less fit in with the title. The chapters are cross-referenced and systematically organised, to fit within the consistent theme.

The book can be divided into four parts for the purpose of this review. Chapter 1 depicts the changes in forest policies in India since 1952 and the current status of JFM, and outlines orders, guidelines and rules issued by the government with respect to JFM. This chapter presents the layout of the entire volume. Chapter 2 reviews the monitoring and evaluation studies done in India in the 1990s and examines statistical methods and analytical techniques adopted in these studies.

Chapters 3 to 8 evaluate the rate of spread, performance and impact of JFM from the community's perspective, based on studies undertaken during the period of 2001 to 2002 in six states, namely Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Tripura and West Bengal. Each of these empirical studies adopts a common analytical methodology and is reported by and large with a uniform layout so that the results are comparable across states.

Chapter 9 presents experiences and lessons from the case studies with special reference to Karnataka, Rajasthan and West Bengal. Chapter 10 attempts to bring together the main findings and conclusions from the state level case studies conducted by the EERN. Chapter 11 presents a further analysis of the impact of JFM operated in Karnataka, focusing on the ecological issues including species richness and diversity, fuelwood supply and demand, biodiversity and biomass increment.

Chapter 12 addresses silvicultural strategies and options. This issue is considered critical in promoting and sustaining community participation, and sustaining JFM. Chapter 13 examines various monitoring and evaluation methods of JFM that were employed in the field studies reported in Chapters 3 through 8 in this volume and in the earlier studies reviewed in Chapter 2. The chapter then draws useful frameworks of analysis for inquiry into the performance and impact of JFM. Chapter 14, as the concluding chapter, highlights key challenges facing JFM and puts forward financial and institutional policy suggestions conducive to sustaining JFM in India.

The strength of this book lies in a plethora of current empirical work and its attempt to synthesise the survey analyses. In addition, one need not have any in-depth knowledge of statistics or forestry to read this book, except for Chapter 11. Although the text is largely descriptive, the book contains convincing data that the JFM is a successful community forestry model. On the other hand, for readers who wish to be provided with a 'big picture' of the role and performance of other forestry programs operating in India, its major weakness lies in an absence of broad institutional information on the country's forestry programs, including social forestry and community forest management. A minor weak point is that in addition to the general introduction to this volume (Chapter 1), each chapter has an introduction, much of the content of which is unnecessarily repetitive. Also, it would have been useful for readers if a bibliography for further reading on JFM had been provided at the end of the book, apart from the list of cited references at the end of each chapter. On the whole, however, this book will undoubtedly be a valuable source of information for researchers and other parties interested in the JFM.

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